

to reduce class size in early grades through the hiring of additional well-qualified teachers. This would mean more individualized attention for students from their teachers, increased learning in the basics that will immeasurably help them in future grades, and a better chance at success from an early age.

I also support other amendments to be offered to S. 280. One will be offered by my colleague, the senior Senator from New Jersey, Mr. LAUTENBERG, regarding an equally vital school modernization initiative. I have spoken in support of this initiative in the past. This plan would finance the building and renovation of public schools through tax credits in lieu of interest on bonds. Hawaii would receive tax credits to support \$50 million in school modernization.

The other amendment that will be offered by Senator BOXER to help communities fund afterschool programs for kindergarten, elementary, and secondary school students will be one that I will support. This will help keep students off the streets after school, for too many youths in my State are left with nothing to do but turn to drugs, alcohol, gangs and other destructive behaviors. And this happens also in other States. These amendments have my full support.

Now I would like to focus my remarks on the class size amendment. I commend my colleagues for supporting the first installment of the 7-year class size reduction proposal last year. We passed \$1.2 billion in 1998 to hire 30,000 teachers. Under this spending, Hawaii will receive more than \$5.6 million. We must pass the Murray-Kennedy amendment to finish the job and assure that the teachers hired under last year's downpayment will continue to be funded.

This amendment would provide \$1.4 billion in fiscal year 2000 to hire 38,000 teachers, which would give Hawaii nearly \$7 million for 178 teachers. So this is something that Hawaii really looks forward to.

Students in my State need these well-qualified, well-trained teachers. I hear from students, parents, and teachers alike that classes are too large. The average size of a class in Hawaii is in the mid-twenties. However, research shows that the optimum number of students in a class, particularly lower grades, is in the mid- to upper-teens.

Among other problems, larger classes create discipline problems, especially in communities with large numbers of at-risk children. If we want to give our students the best possible chance to learn, they need smaller classes and teachers who are able to give them enough personal attention.

In addition to helping students, this amendment would also help Hawaii's teachers. As a former teacher, I have taught both small and large classes. I

have taught in different kinds of systems. I know when students are grasping ideas. And we know when they are not. One of the most rewarding things a teacher can experience is to see the faces of students light up when they realize they have learned something new. When there are too many students in a class and only one teacher to supervise them, the result is a difficult and poor learning environment.

Mr. President, I hope my colleagues on both sides of the aisle will join me in voting for this class size amendment. It makes sense to focus our efforts this way on students during their early grades, because these represent some of the most vital years in a child's educational development. We must give our children a rock-solid foundation in the basics so they may continue to build a strong base of knowledge throughout their educational history. We know that well-educated children will mean a great citizenry for the future of our country.

I thank my colleagues, Senators MURRAY and KENNEDY, for giving me this opportunity and this chance to speak on their amendment at this most important time in the history of our country.

Thank you very much, Mr. President. I yield back the remainder of my time. Mr. ABRAHAM addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Michigan.

ORDER OF PROCEDURE

Mr. ABRAHAM. Mr. President, I am here today along with Senators SESSIONS and LEVIN to introduce a very important piece of legislation. I wonder if I could obtain unanimous consent so we might have the speaking in the order in which I would introduce the legislation. Then, after I finish speaking with respect to the legislation, Senator SESSIONS and then Senator LEVIN, in that order, would also have the opportunity to speak to this bill.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered. The Senator has 15 minutes.

(The remarks of Mr. ABRAHAM, Mr. SESSIONS, and Mr. LEVIN pertaining to the introduction of S. 531 are located in today's RECORD under "Statements on Introduced Bills and Joint Resolutions.")

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. BAUCUS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

EDUCATION FLEXIBILITY PARTNERSHIP ACT OF 1999

Mr. BAUCUS. Mr. President, I want to state very simply but strongly and unequivocally that I support S. 280, the Education Flexibility Partnership Act, and I support it very strongly. There is a very simple truth. That is, we need to trust our parents, trust our teachers, trust our local school boards. We should do everything in our power to unshackle our children from binding Federal Government-mandated rules that might make sense in Manhattan, NY, but not in Manhattan, MT.

Two weeks ago I had the honor of addressing the Montana State legislature, and when I spoke I told them that the time has come to bring the promise of world-class education to every Montanan. I daresay that virtually everyone in this body has made the same statement, because he or she believes it very deeply, when speaking to his or her own legislatures back in their own States or to any group whatsoever that is interested in education. I believe very deeply we must do that.

I also believe we need to ingrain that ethic into the hearts and minds of those who care about education all across our country. Indeed, it is similar to the environment. We are the stewards of our children's learning, and our future as a nation very deeply depends on our willingness to invest in them and our teachers and our schools all across our country.

We have a moral responsibility to leave this Nation's children prepared to meet the challenges ahead. That challenge takes a unique form when we talk about meeting the standards of rural States. Nearly 40 percent of the children who go to school in America every day go to a rural school in a small town, yet somehow we as a nation invest only 22 percent of our total education funding in these students. Rural students are being shortchanged by a ratio of 2 to 1. I will work hard this year to see that every student in America, whether in urban America or in rural America, is provided for fairly and equally.

But money alone is not enough. The Federal Government must be a partner in education with parents, teachers, and local schools, not an obstacle. Ed-Flex is the right step to take for our children. All Ed-Flex does is say to States, if you come up with a better way to do your job, we will get out of your way and let you do it. Right now, a well-meaning but confusing and distant Federal bureaucracy too often stands in their way. Let me give some examples.

Say Federal funds allowed a small Montana school, or even a large New York City school, to purchase computers for students with disabilities. Those computers probably will not get used all day long, and it makes sense that these computers be utilized to